

The Great Deliverance.

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A

TUTTLE

OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE CHAPEL OF GRISWOLD COLLEGE,

DAVENPORT,

ON THE

DAY OF NATIONAL THANKSGIVING,

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1865;

BY THE

RT. REV. HENRY W. LEE, D. D.,

BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF IOWA.

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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DAVENPORT



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DAVENPORT:

PUBLISHING HOUSE OF LUSE AND GRIGGS.

1865.

The following Discourse was delivered to the congregation of "The Bishop's Church," recently organized, and now worshipping in the Chapel of Griswold College, and is published in compliance with the desire of some who heard it. It was prepared in much haste, and the writer is fully aware that it presents a very inadequate view of the important subjects referred to. Such as it is, it is respectfully submitted to his fellow-citizens generally, as his humble testimony against the evil deeds of the Nation, and its great trespass, and as a thank-offering to Almighty God for the signal Deliverance vouchsafed to our beloved country by His merciful Providence.

H. W. L.

DAVENPORT, IOWA, Dec. 12, 1865.

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## SERMON.

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EZRA, IX. 13, 14. *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break thy commandments?*

About eighty years after the return of the Jews from Babylon, the Prophet Ezra was permitted by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to go and visit his brethren in Judea; and was empowered by him to rectify all abuses that he might find among them. After his arrival, he heard, to his unspeakable grief, that many of the people had connected themselves by marriage with the surrounding heathen. He therefore humbled himself before God on their account; and looking back upon all that they had suffered for their iniquities, and the marvellous deliverance which God had vouchsafed unto them, he expressed his surprise, his horror, and his indignation, at their great impiety. “After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break thy commandments?”

The people had experienced from time to time the displeasure of God on account of their sins; and from time to time had been mercifully delivered from His judgments. They were visited with alternate mercies and afflictions. At one time, they were scourged with pestilence, and at another with famine or the sword; and when they turned from their sins, the light of God’s countenance beamed upon them, and they were prosperous and happy. In all His dispensations

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towards them, the design of God was to deter them from sin. As the text intimates, the judgments that came upon them were for their "evil deeds," and for their "great trespass;" and yet their punishment was less than their iniquities deserved. God had recently, in a wonderful manner, delivered them from their captivity; and hence their ingratitude was made to appear in a stronger light, when, under these circumstances, they again broke His commandments. Ezra deeply felt and bitterly lamented their sins, and exclaimed, in the anguish of his soul, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers, have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken Thy commandments, which thou hast commanded by Thy servants the prophets. O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous; for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day; behold, we are before Thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before Thee because of this."

God rules by His righteous Providence now, no less than in the days of old; and we are subjects of His government, no less than were His ancient and chosen people Israel.

Let us therefore, on this interesting and appropriate occasion, consider God's recent dispensations towards us as a na-



tion; and may a sense of His unmerited goodness lead us to repentance!

*I. God has visited our sins with judgment.*

I refer to our sins as a people; and who that believes in the overruling Providence of Almighty God can for a moment doubt that the late visitation of the sword was sent upon us for our evil deeds and for our great trespass. Whatever direct or indirect benefits may have resulted or may yet result from the unprecedented contest in which we have been engaged, it should undoubtedly be itself regarded as an actual judgment from heaven, as a great public calamity, sent to punish us for our sins. Indeed, there is no calamity that is not occasioned by sin against God. Sin is the parent of all the ills that flesh is heir to; and were there no sin, there would be no national judgments and no individual suffering. It was sin that brought death into the world and all our woe. Hence there can be no private or general distress which is not connected with sin as its cause and origin. Sin existed in the world before any natural or moral evil pressed upon the human family, and made it liable to disease, pain, and death. Sin entered the world, and trouble and sorrow by sin; and now trouble and sorrow pass upon all, for that all have sinned.

The scourge of war does not seem to come so directly from God as some other judgments of His hand; but still it is His awful messenger, sent in wrath to chastise the nations. Other instruments of vengeance are ready to do His bidding; and sometimes famine and pestilence are commissioned for a work more fearful and fatal than that of the battle-field; but war has most commonly been made the agency by which the High and Mighty Ruler of nations has punished the sins of nations, and made them feel that it is an evil and bitter thing to set at nought His authority, and depart from the holy commandments which He hath given unto them. Thus it comes to pass that a righteous God takes war, which has been well styled "the political form of human depravity," and employs

it for the punishment of that which is its cause and origin,—sin. He, for His own wise purposes, makes use of what is an abomination in His sight,—occasioned by human passion and corruption, and permitted by Him only as all evil is permitted,—for the purpose of visiting national sins with penal severity, and of making the wrath of man to praise Him. That kingdom which is not of this world may gain glory from the disasters of human governments, and even the desolations and miseries of war may be the precursors of an advancing civilization and Christianity. But in itself war is a monstrous evil; and even that which is defensive, and, by universal consent, justifiable, as the last resort of a government for self-preservation, is fraught with unutterable wretchedness and woe, and conceals not the true character of war, as the world's emphatic curse, as the offspring of sin, and the scourge of guilty nations.

This awful judgment of God, as visited upon us, has been a heavy one for the nation at large, and it is of unspeakable importance that we should acknowledge the hand of God in it. His Providence inflicted the blow; and if we do not trace His displeasure in all that we have suffered, and turn away from our iniquities that we have committed, we shall heap upon ourselves fearful aggravations of guilt, and incur increased indignation and punishment from Him who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. How have happy homes been desolated, and how have fond hearts been made to bleed, during the progress of the unjustifiable and wicked rebellion! How many precious lives have been sacrificed, and what untold treasure has been lavished, in the awful strife! The land is filled with widows and with orphans, and lamentation and weeping and mourning are heard on every side. Such is war,

“Whose harvest-field is human life,

Whose sickle is the reeking sword!”

Well might England's great Poet exclaim,

“O war, thou son of hell,

Whom angry heavens do make their minister!”

Such has it been to us,—the minister of vengeance from an offended God, punishing us for our evil deeds, and for our



great trespass. Our evil deeds had long testified against us, and our great trespass had grown unto the heavens. By irreverence and profanity the most shocking, by intemperance and Sabbath-breaking the most open and unblushing, by avarice and licentiousness the most debasing and shameful, and by all those kindred and concomitant vices whose name is Legion, we were ripe for our punishment, and the Lord made bare His holy arm to inflict it upon us. And then there was what may justly be regarded as "*our* great trespass," which had grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength, until all the Divine attributes were against it, and the nation was ready to sink under the heavy burden of its curse. As a mere element of political economy, the system of American Slavery was a clog upon the truest prosperity of the country. As an institution inconsistent and anomalous under a free and popular government, it had long exposed us to the just reproach of the world at large; and as a stupendous moral evil, it was an offence to Him who is the God and Father of all mankind, and with whom there is no respect of persons. Without designing or desiring to refer to this subject in any other manner than such as is suitable and proper to the place and the occasion, I may yet express the prevailing opinion of our own people, and of the whole civilized world, that Slavery was the prime occasion of our civil war. If so, then God, in His justice and judgment, seized upon this one great trespass, and therewith scourged us for that and for all our iniquities. He has punished the whole nation, for we had sinned as a nation. As in other sins, so in this great trespass in particular, the whole people were joined in affinity, and were confederate against God. The South was not alone in responsibility as to the evil in question. It was originally national, both in geographical extent, and in legislative provisions; and had the institution proved as profitable, in a material and pecuniary point of view, at the North as at the South, it may well be doubted whether it would have been so soon removed from amongst ourselves, and whether at the present moment the

whole land might not be suffering from its presence and its abominations; though I am very far from believing that those who have labored for the removal of this evil, in our day and generation, have been generally actuated by motives of self-interest, or by any principle less noble and praise-worthy than the desire to do good to their fellow-men, to promote the welfare of their country, and to do the Divine will. The whole nation, I repeat, was responsible for this evil; and neither the fact that it was entailed upon us by the mother-country when we were her colonies, nor the persuasion that Divine Providence might, by means of Slavery, finally advance the African race to a higher degree of civilization and social improvement, could form any just excuse for the continuance of the evil, though coming to us by inheritance, and though to be preferred, in our estimation, to the wild barbarity of the African tribes. It is, in itself, out of place in a high civilization, and inconsistent with the natural rights of man, and with the true tenor and spirit of the religion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whatever may have been the real and full import of the curse pronounced by Noah upon Canaan; and however true it may be that, in former ages, God, in His wisdom and justice, ordained and doomed certain people to captivity and servitude, or actual destruction, on account of national or ancestral sins, or both combined; it may yet be said, without irreverence, that God will see to it that any curse of His own denunciation is duly accomplished, without any proffered or voluntary human agency; and that under the Gospel dispensation,—even if the Africans are descendants of Canaan,—there are no curses for them or for others, except for such as are finally and wilfully impenitent and incorrigible; and those curses take hold on the soul and the eternal world. Man has no authority to inflict a curse upon his fellow-man, unless he receive a special Divine commission, like that of the ancient Israelites, by virtue of which they made a destructive and exterminating war upon the Canaanites, and thus, either partially, or to the full extent, verified the fearful malediction to

which we have referred, and which was uttered as many as eight hundred years before. The Gospel dispensation is a dispensation of blessing, not of cursing; and we are most like the Divine Master himself when we strive to relieve the suffering and the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to raise those who are fallen, and to bring all mankind to the blessed light, elevation, privileges, and enjoyments of freemen in Christ Jesus.

II. Thus have we been punished for our evil deeds and for our great trespass; *but our God has punished us less than our iniquities deserve.*

Our sufferings have by no means equalled our sins. If we consider the enormity of any one of our national sins, already enumerated, or our general forgetfulness of God, we shall be convinced that it might justly bring down upon us all that we have endured; and if God had proceeded against us according to the tremendous *aggregate* of our offences, we should have been made like unto Sodom and Gomorrah. O how fearfully have we resembled God's ancient but ungrateful and disobedient people, when it was said concerning them, "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

III. But, thanks be unto His name, He has not only punished us less than our iniquities deserve;—*He has vouchsafed us a gracious deliverance.*

The deliverance granted to the Jews, in their return from Babylon, was scarcely inferior to that which they had formerly experienced, in their departure from Egypt. And has not ours also been a great deliverance? While the work of death was going on, the people, with remarkable unanimity, responded to the repeated calls of the departed and lamented Chief Magistrate, and humbled themselves before God, imploring His pardoning mercy, and entreating Him to stay the progress of the desolating judgment which our sins had brought upon us. Both rulers and people seemed to have the

feelings of the king of Nineveh, when he and his subjects fasted and repented under the threatenings of the Most High by His prophet Jonah; for, said he, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" The spectacle was a sublime one. On the day appointed, the mass of the people refrained from their customary employments, and to outward appearance, at least, bowed themselves before the Lord in deep penitence and contrition. A Sabbath stillness reigned in city and hamlet, and from the lips and hearts of assembled thousands went forth earnest supplications for God's sparing mercy. There was an evident and pervading feeling that *God was in the war*, and that he was visiting us in displeasure for our sins; thus vindicating His own authority, as well as providentially paving the way of the nation to a loftier position among the powers of the earth, and to a closer accordance with His own Divine will. And who can say that that general humiliation and those earnest prayers had no connection with the great deliverance which God has vouchsafed? The scourge has been withdrawn, and the voice of joy and praise is in the dwellings of the people. The mandate has gone forth to the death-angel, saying, "It is enough," and his sword is sheathed. True, sorrow and anguish are in many a heart and in many a household on this glad day; but with the great body of the people fear and anxiety have given place to cheerfulness and gratitude, and throughout the length and breadth of the land the business of life is pursuing its usual course, our citizen-soldiers are quietly resuming the avocations of peace, and we all feel that the danger is overpast. There is indeed much painful solicitude as to the full success of the government in composing the elements of disaffection and strife in the late rebellious States; and there is not a little anxiety as to the condition and prospects of those who are loosed from their bonds, and are entering upon a new and untried career; as though the Providence of God, which has thus far led us on in this great work, would be likely to fail us in its continuance and



completion! This solicitude and anxiety do widely prevail, and may moderate the joy of some in all parts of the land; but the sound of battle is no longer heard, and as a nation we are keeping this our festal day in giving thanks to Him who hath wrought this great deliverance.

It would seem that this great deliverance could not fail to fill the hearts of this whole people with emotions of gratitude and praise to the merciful Giver of every good and perfect gift. He who sent the judgment has taken it away; and now our thankfulness to Him should certainly equal the fear and anxiety which we experienced while the danger was hanging over us. The Divine goodness in our national preservation should lead us to national repentance. Repentance, indeed, is that best and most acceptable thanksgiving that we can possibly offer unto our God; and we cannot offer it aright, unless we connect with it a sincere and unreserved dedication of ourselves to Him in a sober, righteous, and godly life. We shall prove ourselves unworthy of the least of His mercies, if, after He has done such great things for us, we fail to give Him the homage of grateful hearts, and live on unmindful of His laws, and regardless of His will. It is recorded of the wicked king of Egypt, that when he "saw that the rain, and the hail, and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, both he and his servants." While the Divine judgments were actually upon him, he seemed to have some sense of sin, and some fear of God; but as soon as they were removed, he became more hardened in his wickedness, and more determined in his rebellion. While he felt the Divine chastisements, he resolved to obey the Divine will, and let the people go; but when the plagues ceased, he forgot the vows he had made in his trouble, and persisted in his refusal to comply with the Divine command. O may the rulers and people of this favored land take warning from this case, recorded for our learning, and beware lest now that the judgment of God has passed away, they forget the good resolutions made in time of danger and calamity; and, repudiating



that righteousness which exalteth a nation, fall again into those sins which are a reproach to any people. It does seem to me that, if after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, we do not enter upon a more elevated national career, conforming more closely to the Divine word and will, and letting our light shine before the nations, we shall deserve the most awful disasters that were ever visited upon the kingdoms and governments of this world, and be in danger of utter destruction from the wrath of an offended God.

IV. How earnestly, then, should the people of these United States consider the interrogation of the prophet, "Seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; *should we again break thy commandments?*"

The whole of the second verse of the text is as follows, and it is most singularly and remarkably appropriate to us at the present time: "Should we again break Thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? Wouldest Thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?" The entire reunion of this nation is the most desirable event in the civil affairs of the age in which we live; and God grant that the work of reconstruction may be as speedily accomplished as will be consistent with the stability of the government, and the highest good of the whole people. But most important of all is it that we come together again upon the basis of justice, righteousness and truth. We were all sinners together, and together provoked the anger of the Lord, especially by our great trespass; and now let us see to it that we do not join in affinity with those who endeavored to separate from us, to do any of the abominations for which we have all been punished, and more particularly to commit that great trespass, which, while it had rested more immediately upon them for many years, and had become interwoven in the very texture of their political and social existence, was

yet a trespass in which, as I have said, we were all concerned, and for the apparent removal of which we all ought to rejoice together, and give thanks to God for so great a deliverance. I cannot suppose that human bondage will ever again be legalized within our borders. The memorable proclamation of the fallen Commander in Chief, and the voice of Congress and of the people in an amended Constitution, will undoubtedly prove insuperable barriers to the return of this great evil; but an institution so long established dies hard, and some of its unhappy peculiarities and influences may linger for years after it has itself received its death-blow, and is numbered among the things of the past. The people should not feel that the whole work of repentance for this trespass is accomplished, until every vestige of it is put out of sight, and they have done all in their power to elevate and save an oppressed and downtrodden race, who this day call for our sympathy and aid, and who will rise up in the judgment with us and condemn us, unless we endeavor to fulfill, with reference to them, that golden rule of our common Lord and Master, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

This subject, my brethren, is one of great practical importance; and, in conclusion, I urge upon you its most serious and prayerful consideration. I ask you to take a strictly religious view of the whole matter, and to dismiss from your minds all mere political and party prepossessions and feelings. For my own part, I will never intentionally bring into the pulpit the ordinary topics and controversies of politicians and statesmen. Our people see and hear enough of these things in the public newspapers, and in the daily intercourse of life. But from these sources they do not often learn their duties and responsibilities as Christian citizens, who, while they render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, are solemnly bound to render unto God the things that are God's. These duties and responsibilities should be enjoined from time to time by the ministers of religion, though they should exercise great cau

tion as to the frequency of their introduction, and the detailed mode of their treatment. During the progress of the war, my own allusions to it, in sermons and in the Convention of the Diocese, were never made in the spirit of a political partisan, or from a desire to favor or gratify any political or party organization. From the first awful gun at Sumter, to the surrender of the last armed band of the rebellion, I have endeavored, on all proper occasions, to make a religious use of the war, and to lead the people to regard it as a Divine judgment upon the sins of the nation, calling loudly for repentance and amendment, and forewarning us of still more fiery indignation, if we continued in our evil deeds, and in our great trespass, and turned not unto the Lord our God, in the ways of His laws and in the works of His commandments. And now that the "seditious tumults" have been appeased, and we are delivered from "those great and apparent dangers wherewith we were compassed," I would, as a servant of the Most High, call upon the people to acknowledge His goodness and loving-kindness in our defence and protection, and to praise His holy Name for so signally interposing in our behalf, that the authority of the Government is re-established over the whole land, and a "great enlargement" given to civil liberty, in the removal of involuntary servitude, and thereby of a principal cause of all our national discords and contentions.

It was with these same feelings and motives that I was constrained, in our recent General Convention, to give my voice and my vote in favor of returning thanks to God for these benefits, in addition to those of the "restoration of peace to the country, and of unity to the Church"; though, at the same time, I could not call in question the Christian sincerity and patriotism of the great body of the Bishops and Deputies who, from "an extreme desire for conciliation and harmony," or from general views of ecclesiastical policy and expediency, so controlled the action of the Convention, that its public Thanksgiving was restricted to a partial acknowledgment of

the blessings received and of the evils averted by the wonder-working Providence of Almighty God. This course does not at all impair my confidence in the Church itself,—in its fealty to its Divine Head, or in its true loyalty to our beneficent Government,—especially when it is so apparent to almost every one that there is great room for an honest difference of opinion as to the extent to which such subjects, important as they are, should, in such a country as ours, be brought into ecclesiastical debate and legislation. I frankly confess that it was my earnest desire that if any action whatever was to be taken on this subject by the General Convention, we should, as a Church, at such a crisis in our national history, solemnly recognize the hand of God in the momentous events brought about so wonderfully by His all-wise Providence,—the preservation of the Union amidst such unprecedented dangers, and the actual or prospective removal of the most prominent cause of national discord, in the extinction of the evil of Slavery. But if the policy adopted shall really serve to conciliate and harmonize our Southern brethren generally, or those of our own Church in particular, and make them more fully inclined to unity and concord, both in the State and in the Church, surrendering their sectional feelings, and their separate and premature ecclesiastical organization,—I shall be comparatively content; while I might still individually regret that such action of the Convention should have been deemed expedient as would unavoidably involve the sad disappointment of so many among ourselves, and of such multitudes of our fellow-citizens, who appreciate our influence, and who strongly desired to hear our voice in a more emphatic tone, under the circumstances in which the nation has been placed by God's providential dispensations.

My brethren, it is our individual as well as national duty to make a faithful use of these dispensations, by seeking to be preserved from again breaking the Divine commandments. He hath not dealt so with any nation, and He demands of us an individual and national recognition of His goodness, and



devotion to His service. He hath given us a good land, a land wherein we may eat bread without scarceness, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills we may dig brass; a land of fruitful seasons and plentiful harvests, of unequalled civil blessings and religious privileges; and, under these circumstances, let us beware that we forget not the Lord our God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which He hath commanded us. Let us shun all sin, and walk before Him in all holy obedience. Sin is the abominable thing which His soul hateth, and He will surely punish it in this world or in the next. Nations are punished here, and individuals here or hereafter; but they are both sure to suffer, if they transgress the Divine laws. Let us then make our peace with God, and learn righteousness from His avenging judgments. And let our righteousness be of that genuine and practical kind which, while it takes hold on God, is tenderly mindful of the wants and woes of our fellow-men. Let us remember the needy and the destitute, the widow and the orphan, the sick and the afflicted, the suffering and the sorrowful. Let us send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared, and make ourselves happy by contributing to the happiness of others. The trumpet of the Winter storms is already sounding far and wide, and the cold winds are rushing and howling around the habitations of the poor. Let us remember them in our joy to-day, and especially those or the families of those who went forth in our defence, and secured to us, through the Divine blessing, our great deliverance, for which we are now giving thanks. Let us not forget those fatherless ones, gathered here in our midst, the children of those who willingly gave their lives for their country's salvation, and in deep gratitude to whose memory we should take pleasure in caring for those they left behind.\* Let us be Christian disciples and Christian citizens, acknowledging Jesus Christ as our King and Governor, as the Prince of

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\*Several hundred children are gathered at Davenport in the "Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home."



Peace, and the Lord our Righteousness, the Guide of our life, and the Saviour of our souls. It is because of His blessed advent and the principles of His holy Gospel, that we enjoy the inestimable privileges which characterize us as a nation; and let us so cultivate the spirit of His pure religion, that we may rise higher and higher in all that makes a people truly great and happy; and so transmit to coming generations the precious boon, received from our fathers, defended and preserved and enhanced by ourselves, under God's favoring Providence,—even that liberty and independence by which we have secured an honored name among the principalities and powers of the earth, which are priceless blessings for the life that now is, and which should ever remind us of that glorious liberty of the sons of God, which is begun here below by faith in the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and attains unto its full consummation and perfection in that heavenly kingdom above, where is fulness of joy, and where are pleasures forevermore.

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## APPENDIX.

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The following correspondence is inserted here, in order to give more fully to the readers of the foregoing Discourse the views of its author in regard to the action of the General Convention, to which he therein makes brief reference. It appeared originally in the *Davenport Daily Gazette*, of Nov. 18, 1865.

BISHOP LEE, GRISWOLD COLLEGE, DAVENPORT, IOWA, }  
November 11, 1865. }

*Right Reverend and Dear Sir:* In common with many in our Church as well as out of it, I have been pained and disappointed at the course of our recent General Convention in regard to the affairs of the country, and have received impressions with reference to the majority of that body, in both houses, which I would gladly have removed, if possible. Knowing your general views and sympathies as to the matters in question, and seeing your name appended to a statement made by the minority in the House of Bishops, I beg leave to ask you to give me such information on the subject as may be consistent with your views of propriety as a member of a body whose doings, in their details, are not ordinarily made known to the public. I make this request in the hope that my own mind

may, in some measure, be relieved, and that, in such case, I may, with your consent, make such use of your reply as may relieve others also.

With great respect, I remain yours faithfully,

D. S. SHELDON.

DAYENPORT, November 13, 1865.

*My Dear Professor SHELDON:* Yours of the 11th inst. has been received, and I cheerfully comply with your request, consenting that you may make such use of my reply as you may deem desirable and expedient, though regretting that my numerous engagements and somewhat impaired health will not allow me to give that attention to the subject which its importance demands, and which you have a right to expect.

I went to the General Convention with the expectation that the matter referred to would almost necessarily come up for consideration and action, especially in connection with the Ecclesiastical position of our Southern brethren, whether any of them should be present or not; though I had not in my mind any definite plans of procedure in regard to the delicate and important points involved in the case; while, at the same time, I had a strong desire to have the Church stand firmly by the country and its government, and also show a disposition to treat with brotherly kindness and charity those who had separated from us under what they regarded the necessities of the position in which they were placed by the then existing war, but who might be expected to retrace their steps when the war had ended, and its objects, on the part of the South had failed of fulfilment.

By common consent, the General Convention practically regarded the organization of "The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America" as a nullity, and the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the South as truly in the "Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America" as before the rebellion. That organization was really set aside and ignored by the reception of the Bishop and Deputies from North Carolina, of the Missionary Bishop of the South West, and of the Deputies from Texas; as well as by the action of both Houses with reference to the Bishop of Alabama. It was evidently considered that that premature organization lapsed with the "Confederacy;" or, rather, that neither ever had any legal or valid existence. This view of the case is necessary to a right appreciation of the motives that actuated a large portion of the Bishops and Deputies in their votes on the various forms in which this whole subject came before them. The majority thought that no action should be taken which would be at all calculated to give offence to the members from the South, or to the South generally, and so endanger or delay that complete reunion which all feel to be desirable. Hence they opposed the expression, in resolutions, or in the Thanksgiving service, of any opinions or sentiments in which *all* could not unite, on the ground that it was better to refrain from action which was right in itself, though not absolutely necessary, than to take such action and offend those whom all wished, in every proper way, to conciliate. Hence the rejection of various resolutions in the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies, and the course of the House of Bishops in relation to the day of Thanksgiving. It was decided by a majority of the Bishops that the special form for that occasion should express thanks to God "for the return of peace to the country, and of unity to the Church;" while the minority was anxious to include, with these blessings, *the restoration of the authority of the Government over the whole country, and the removal of the great evil of human bondage.* One of the Southern Bishops stated to the House that the people of the South could not be expected to be thankful for their own defeat, that they submitted to the United States Government from necessity, and that while they fully intended to be good citizens, he thought that he and those situated like him ought not be called upon to join in a service such as was desired by what proved to be a minority of the House. He intimated that he might not in all things go so far as some at the South; but he hoped his brother Bishops would confine themselves to thanksgiving for the restoration of peace to

the country, and of unity to the Church, as in this all could heartily unite. It was also stated that many in the Church, both at the North and the South, did not regard the freedom of the negroes as a blessing, either to themselves or to the country, and therefore that that subject should not come into the thanksgiving prayer.

Some, in both Houses, were opposed to any action whatever on the subject, on the ground that Ecclesiastical bodies should confine themselves wholly to Ecclesiastical matters. These, however, voted with the majority, to prevent a result that they deemed more objectionable than the one which was actually reached.

In the House of Bishops, the minority contended that thanksgiving for the return of peace to the country, and of unity to the Church, did not include *all* for which we were bound to be thankful to the God of our fathers; and that if we omitted the restoration of the authority of the Government over the whole land, and the removal of involuntary servitude from our borders, we omitted the chief blessings which Divine Providence had worked out for us by the awful judgments of his hand. It was suggested by one Bishop that it were better to have no such service as was proposed, than to refuse to thank God for the very things that we had so long prayed for, and which had been so wonderfully brought to pass by His mighty power. But as the Bishops had appointed a day of Fasting during the Convention of 1862, when the fearful contest was in progress, and as now a day of Thanksgiving was generally expected, it was deemed expedient to make the appointment, and it was made and observed accordingly. The service was an interesting one, and though all my feelings and desires were not met and satisfied thereby, I yet found much enjoyment on the occasion, and felt that it was good to be there. The special Thanksgiving was more full and comprehensive than was anticipated under the circumstances, and for one I was rejoiced that the great body of the Convention could adopt language that came so near to that which the minority had endeavored to incorporate in the appointed service.

When it became fully apparent that no expression of views could go forth from either House that would be at all unacceptable to the Southern brethren, or meet the earnest desires of many in the Church in various parts of the country, and the expectations of multitudes of our fellow-citizens not of our communion, the minority of Clerical and Lay Deputies presented a Protest to the action of that House; and at the very close of the Convention the minority of the Bishops made a brief statement of the case to that House, and it has since been given to the public through the columns of the religious and secular papers. In signing the statement, I, for my part, was very much influenced by a desire to bear my testimony *against* the public impression that the majority of the Bishops, as well as of the Deputies, were disloyal to the Government, and in real sympathy with the South in its secession and rebellion. *This I did not and do not believe.* A portion of the statement is as follows: "The House of Bishops unquestionably loved their country and its unity, and they could not approve the system of human bondage; but they will *seem* to have adopted as the position to be henceforth occupied by this Church, one which is consistent with indifference to the safety and unity of the nation, and to the freedom of the oppressed. This is a position which, as the undersigned believe, should not be maintained by any branch of the Christian Church in the United States, whether in the present or any future generation. To signify that it was not accepted by all on this occasion, and that those who did not accept it believed it to be accepted at all, *only* because an *extreme* desire for conciliation and unanimity prevailed for the hour,—the undersigned have prepared this document, with perfect and cordial respect for their brethren, but under the consciousness of a great duty to the inseparable interests of their beloved Church and country."

The public mind had become much excited against the Convention, and the belief was quite general that it was under the control of designing politicians and of Southern influences; and it seemed due to the majority that those who had felt obliged to differ from them should declare their conviction that their brethren



were actuated by pure and honest motives, and not by those which were so freely attributed to them by the popular mind and the public press. Hence the expression of the opinion, in the statement, that the majority were influenced in their action on this subject by "an extreme desire for conciliation and unanimity." No unworthy motive is charged upon them, and I have no doubt that in their consciences they believed they were doing what was best both for the Church and the country. The popular mind does not always discriminate, and often forms a hasty judgment; and in this case many have seized upon the failure of the Convention to express certain sentiments as a sure proof that opposite sentiments were actually held, and that the great body of the Bishops and Deputies were destitute of true patriotism, and at heart disloyal to the government under which they live. I regret most deeply that such an impression has been made upon the popular mind of our country, and I did what I could to prevent it. If the Convention took any action whatever upon National affairs, I wanted it to be thorough and outspoken. Otherwise, I preferred that it should be entirely silent. I thought that we could say *all* that would be necessary, without giving just offence to our Southern brethren, and without intruding upon what are called politics. You well know my great dislike for extraneous preaching and extraneous Church legislation. My views are by some regarded as extreme in this respect; but at such a crisis as that through which we have just passed as a nation, I have felt that the Pulpit and the Church had an appointed duty to discharge; though, at the same time, I have discouraged what have been termed "war sermons," and have invariably, in my own discourses and Convention addresses, confined myself to a strictly religious view of the war, and avoided those detailed allusions which might be regarded as political and secular in their character and tendencies. I hope I have not failed in my duty to my country, either in my private life or in my public teaching. The community in which my lot is cast know where I have stood, and how I have felt; and yet I have not considered myself called upon to pursue such a course as to stir up bitterness and strife, and make the House of God an unwelcome place to any class of devout worshippers, or to make myself conspicuous among my fellow-citizens in any character or capacity inconsistent with the sacred office which I hold as a minister of Jesus Christ.

I did not design, however, to say so much of myself or of my course during the war. What I have thus said has come in incidentally. It is now time to draw to a close what I intended should be a much more brief communication. You see what my own preference was in regard to the action of the General Convention. The historical crisis through which the nation had passed, being unprecedented and momentous; and God, in his wonderful Providence, having brought us out of our troubles by a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm, preserving the Union and destroying slavery, as well as giving "peace to the country and unity to the Church," I was in favor of recognizing *all* these great blessings when we came before His presence with thanksgiving. The majority judged otherwise, for the reasons already stated, and because, as they urged, we were representing the *whole* Church again, and not merely a portion of it, as in 1862. The record of the Convention is made up; its action has become history; its influence has gone abroad. In my opinion, too much was yielded to the South; but if an error was committed, it was the effect of "an *extreme* desire for conciliation and unanimity," and was *not* the fruit of disloyalty. The Church may suffer in some quarters from an opposite impression; but the charge of disloyalty upon the Convention, as a body, I believe to be unfounded and unjust. This I feel bound to insist upon as a matter of simple justice to my brother Bishops and the members of the Convention generally. Many untouched points of interest and importance press upon my mind, but I can proceed no further.

Praying that all these things may be overruled for the good of the Church, and the glory of God, and invoking the Divine benediction upon our beloved and reunited country, I am

Your affectionate friend and Bishop,

HENRY W. LEE.





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